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ABSTRACT

Logotherapy is a meaning-centered psychotherapy which focuses on both the meaning of human existence and the personal search for meaning. If the will to search for meaning is frustrated, "existential frustration" may result. This study validates the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS) developed by Good and Good (1974). Basic principles of logotherapy are discussed and related research is reviewed. The materials used in this study include the EAS, the Purpose in Life (PIL) test, the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) test, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and a demographic data sheet. The researcher chose multiple regression to test the significance of the combination of PIL, SONG, depression, drug use, and other demographic variable on high existential anxiety. It was hypothesized that high existential anxiety correlates with low PIL scores, high SONG scores, high depression, drug use, high sexual activity, fewer close friends, and lack of involvement in spiritual or religious activities. Results substantiated the hypothesis that high existential anxiety is significantly related to low PIL scores, high SONG scores, and high depression. No other hypotheses were substantiated. Contains 15 references. (RJM)

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A Validation Study of the Existential Anxiety Scale

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Abstract

This study is a validation study of the Existential Anxiety Scale developed by Good and Good (1974). The basic principles of logotherapy are discussed and related research is reviewed. The materials used in this study include the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS), the Purpose in Life test (PIL), the Seeking of Noetic Goals test (SONG), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and a demographic data sheet. Multiple regression was chosen to test the significance of the combination of PIL, SONG, depression, drug use and other demographic variables on high existential anxiety. It was hypothesized that high existential anxiety is associated with low PIL scores, high SONG scores, high depression, drug use, high sexual activity, fewer close friends, and lack of involvement in spiritual or religious activities. Results substantiated the hypothesis that high existential anxiety is significantly related to low PIL scores, high SONG scores, and high depression. No other hypotheses were substantiated.

Logotherapy is a meaning-centered psychotherapy which focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for meaning in his life. The primary motivational force in man is the need to find meaning in life (Frankl, 1978). This need to find meaning, or "will to meaning", is in contrast to the "will to pleasure" on which Freudian psychoanalysis is based, and the "will to power" on which Adlerian psychology is based. Meaning must and can be fulfilled by each individual alone. Man is the only being having this inherent need to find meaning in life, and this need represents an awareness of the spiritual significance of life (Frankl, 1984). Frankl contends that logotherapy is a secular approach which can be utilized regardless of the individual's religious attitudes or spiritual orientation (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981).

If the will to meaning is frustrated, the resulting condition is called "existential frustration." According to Frankl, the term "existential" may be used in three ways: (a) existence itself, that is, the specifically human mode of being, (b) the meaning of existence, and (c) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence or the "will" to meaning (Frankl, 1984).

Existential frustration can lead to what Frankl calls "noogenic neuroses." Noogenic neurosis is a "logotherapeutic term which denotes anything pertaining to the specifically human dimension (Frankl, 1984, p. 123). Noogenic Neuroses may develop as a result of existential crises such as the frustration to the

will to meaning. Noogenic neurosis is a neurosis "arising not so much from repressed traumata, a weak ego, or life stress, but rather from the individual's inability to see meaning in life, so that he lives in an unauthentic existential modality. The problem for him is to find meaning in life and to pass on to an authentic modality of existence" (Ellenberger, 1958, p. 119). The purpose of logotherapy is to assist the individual in finding meaning and purpose in his life. Counselors or therapists familiar with logotherapy may provide guidance or therapy to individuals experiencing existential frustration. However, noogenic neurosis develops in neurotically predisposed persons and requires psychiatric intervention (Crumbaugh & Henrion, 1988). Frankl refers to this neurosis as the "collective neurosis" of our time, and it constitutes about 20% of modern day clinical case loads. Frankl contends that more than half of the general population is experiencing existential frustration or is engulfed in the throes of what he calls the "existential vacuum."

"Existential vacuum" refers to a lack of meaning and purpose in life or inner emptiness. Again, the existential vacuum is a common phenomenon of our time and is characterized by a spiritual emptiness, feelings of apathy, boredom, and lack of purpose and meaning in life. Persons engulfed in the existential vacuum or persons experiencing "existential anxiety" are prone to depression, aggression, and addiction. Frankl (cited in Good & Good, 1974) differentiates existential anxiety from neurotic anxiety by describing existential anxiety as being associated with feelings of despair, alienation, emptiness, and a lack of

meaning in life, whereas, neurotic anxiety is associated with feelings of fear guilt or distress (Good & Good, 1974). According to Frankl, it is common for persons experiencing existential anxiety to engage in medicating behaviors in an effort to deal with the pain and meaninglessness they are experiencing in their lives. Depression and sexual addiction are not uncommon to persons in the throes of the existential vacuum. Frankl postulated that there are several other masks or guises under which the existential vacuum appears. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is masked by a will to power or even the will to money (Frankl, 1984).

The present study investigates the condition of experiencing existential anxiety and the logotherapeutic construct of "existential vacuum" by measuring purpose in life, motivation to find a purpose in life, level of depression, and existential anxiety. The Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS) is a 32 item self-report scale which measures existential anxiety (Good and Good, 1974). No research using the EAS has been conducted since the scale was developed. The measure yielded a reliability estimate (KR-20) of .89 for a sample of 237 undergraduates. Good and Good (1974) found that persons experiencing existential anxiety tend to have a low need for achievement, which is not uncommon for individuals with lack of meaning or purpose in life (Frankl, 1984). The present study will utilize the EAS developed by Good and Good (1974) to determine if the scale (EAS) is a valid measure of existential anxiety. Subjects respond T for true and F for false to each of the 32 items on the EAS. The Purpose in

Life (PIL) test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969, 1981) is an attitude scale also constructed from the orientation of logotherapy. The aim of the PIL is to detect the condition of being engulfed in the existential vacuum. The PIL is frequently used in research and is useful in individual counseling and in group administration for research and screening purposes in non competitive situations (Crumbaugh and Henrion, 1988). The PIL is divided into three parts: (a) A 20 item psychometric scale that evokes responses about the individual's purpose in life, (b) a 13 item "incomplete sentences" test designed to indicate the degree to which an individual experiences purpose in life, and (c) a biographical data paragraph to be written by test participants on life goals, ambitions, hopes, future plans, what has provided them meaning in the past, and what could motivate them in the future. Parts B and C are subject to use in clinical situations on an individual basis and part A is objectively scored (Crumbaugh and Henrion, 1988). Part A is the only section ordinarily used in research, and is the only part utilized in this study. The Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) test is a 20 item Likert-type self-report measure of motivation to find meaning in life (Crumbaugh, 1977). In the present study, both the PIL and the SONG were converted to 5-point scales rather than 7-point scales in order to utilize computer scoring. It is expected that if an individual finds meaning and purpose in life, he has little motivation to search for meaning. The research on the PIL and the SONG has supported this proposition (Crumbaugh, 1977). The SONG is used in conjunction with the PIL and complements the PIL

in that if an individual has found meaning and purpose in life (as indicated by his PIL score), he would not be motivated to search for meaning and purpose (as indicated from his SONG score). Both the PIL and the SONG have been utilized in research and clinical practice for several years, and the validity of the instruments has not genneraly been questioned. However, Dyck (1987) evaluated both the PIL and the SONG and judged the PIL to be an indirect measure of depression and concluded that the PIL may be related to an existential vacuum-like construct. Dyck also found that the SONG was an invalid measure of will to meaning, and he stated that the will to meaning appears to be an unmeasurable conxtruct. Dyck indicated that a new measure of existential vacuum is needed.

This study also explores the relationship between depression and existential anxiety by utilizing the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The BDI was derived from clinical observations about the attitudes and symptoms displayed frequently by depressed psychiatric patients and infrequently by non-depressed psychiatric patients (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erhaugh, 1961). The clinical observations were consolidated systematically into 21 symptoms and attitudes (or items) which can be rated from 0 to 3 in term of intensity. The items were chosen to assess the intensity of depression. It is self-administered and takes 5 to 10 minutes to complete. It is scored by summing the ratings given to each of the 21 items (Beck & Garbin, 1988). Along with these instruments, subjects completed a demographic data sheet, and information was collected regarding

age, race, sex, spirituality or religious activity, drug use and many other demographic variables. This information was obtained in order to investigate the relationship between certain demographics and existential anxiety, depression, purpose in life, and seeking of noetic goals.

Pilecka (1985) found that depression and high anxiety, as well as difficulty in adjustment were positively correlated. It was anticipated that persons scoring high on the Existential Anxiety Scale will also have high scores on the Beck Depression Inventory. Garcia-Pintos (1988) administered the PIL and the Geriatric Depression Scale to 181 elderly residents of Buenos Aires, and found that 80% of the severely depressed subjects reported feelings of meaninglessness. They found that there was a significant relationship between subjects feelings of life satisfaction and level of depression. Pilecka (1985) found that low PIL scores were associated with clinically depressed or suicidal clients. Similar results are expected in the present study.

This study will also look at the relationship between existential anxiety and drug use. Padelford (1974) found drug involvement to be significantly greater among subjects with low PIL scores than among those with high PIL scores in a tenth grade high school population in a middle to lower-middle class community. Padelford also found that PIL scores were significantly higher for females than for males and higher for Anglo-American subjects than for subjects of Mexican-American descent. Again, Frankl (1984) has postulated that persons

engulfed in the existential vacuum are at high risk for drug use, and therefore, the present study anticipates that persons experiencing high anxiety will be more prone to drug abuse or other addictive behaviors. Another variable that was explored is religious involvement or spirituality. It was expected that persons involved in spiritual pursuits have lower existential anxiety, low depression, high purpose in life and a low score on the SONG, since they will probably have more meaning in their lives. Paloutzian (1981) found that religious converts scored significantly higher on the PIL than did non converts, and fear of death declined following conversion.

The relationship of various other demographic variables on existential anxiety was explored in this study as well. Some of these variables included age, sex, educational level, number of close friends, race, marital status, and employment status. Meirer and Edwards (1974) found that older persons tended to have higher purpose in life than younger persons. The subjects in that study were a nonpatient, church-going, Christian population. They found no sex differences with the PIL. It is believed that individuals with a network of close friends have significantly lower existential anxiety scores, higher purpose in life and less depression than isolated persons or individuals with few or no friends. In summary, the primary hypothesis in this study is that high existential anxiety is significantly related to depression, low purpose in life, and low seeking of noetic goals.

Method

Subjects

Subjects consisted of 461 graduate and undergraduate college students enrolled in psychology classes at a large university in middle Tennessee. Fourteen of the answer sheets were unusable due to subject errors and deletions. This left a total of 447 usable answer sheets. Subjects were informed that participation was voluntary. Testing was done anonymously, in that participants were asked not to put their names on the test answer sheets. Participants were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists" (American Psychological Association, 1981).

Materials

Subjects were given the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS), the Purpose in Life (PIL) test, the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) test, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and a demographic information sheet to complete.

Procedures

Testing occurred during the 1992 Fall semester. All testing materials were given in one testing session and took 25 to 40 minutes. Tests and materials were grouped into one testing package (tests were re-numbered so that items were in numerical order) so as to be less confusing and more manageable for researcher and participant.

Results

The means and standard deviations for all variables were computed and correlation matrixes between all possible pairs of variables reported. A stepwise multiple regression was applied to test the significance of the combination of PIL, SONG, and depression on high existential anxiety. Using stepwise multiple regression, the combination of purpose in life (PIL), the seeking of noetic goals (SONG), and depression (BDI) are significant predictors of existential anxiety (EAS) $F(3, 443) = 284.32$, $p = .000$. The regression equation is EAS = 17.47 - .19 (PIL) + 3.07 (BDI) + .05 (SONG). Partial R^2 for each variable is .55 (PIL), .09 (BDI), and .02 (SONG). The total R^2 for this model is .65817, which indicates that 66% of the variability in the scores on the Existential Anxiety Scale was accounted for by the combination of the scores on the Purpose in Life test, Seeking of Noetic Goals test, and the Beck Depression Inventory. This is extremely high and significant.

No relationship between existential anxiety and any of the demographic variables was found. No r of any pairs of correlation coefficients exceeded .30.

Discussion

The current study was designed to validate the Existential Anxiety Scale. The present findings indicate that existential anxiety is significantly related to depression, purpose in life, and seeking of noetic goals. These results were expected. Since

the Existential Anxiety Scale is a short, quick measure of existential anxiety, the scale has many practical applications. It may prove to be useful in clinical settings where there is not a great deal of time for assessing purpose in life or depression and in settings where a measure of existential anxiety is needed. The Existential Anxiety Scale also has potential use in future research relating to logotherapeutic constructs.

A statistically significant relationship was found between happiness with sex life and each of the four instruments utilized in the current study. However, the relationship between sexual happiness and depression, existential anxiety, purpose in life, and the seeking of noetic goals is not significant from a practical sense. For instance, less than 7% of the variance in sexual happiness can be explained by existential anxiety, depression, purpose in life, or the seeking of noetic goals. Relationships between other demographic variables and existential anxiety, depression, purpose in life, and the seeking of noetic goals were even less. Therefore, the hypothesis that high drug use, age, spirituality, and number of close friends is significantly related to existential anxiety was not substantiated.

As indicated previously, Pilecka (1985) found significant relationships between high drug use and purpose in life in middle- to lower-class high school students. Since this reseach did not substantiate Pilecka's findings, we might speculate that the subjects in the two studies were from different age groups and different socioeconomic levels since subjects in the current

study were mostly middle-class college students. Pilecka (1985) also found sex differences on purpose in life. The current study found no significant sex differences.

A significant relationship between existential anxiety and several "medicating behaviors" was expected in the present study, but not substantiated. Subjects were questioned regarding use of several types of drugs and if they had an eating disorder, and they were questioned regarding their sex life. It was expected that subjects with high existential anxiety would be more prone to "medicating" in order to deal with the pain and meaninglessness in their lives. However, the current research did not substantiate this hypothesis. Number of close friends as related to existential anxiety and purpose in life was investigated in the current study as well. It was expected that subjects with a network of close friends would have less existential anxiety and higher purpose in life. The results of the current study did not substantiate this hypothesis. Age differences were expected also, with older, more mature subjects showing less depression and lower existential anxiety, but this was not substantiated either.

Further research on existential anxiety and drug use, as well as other variables, would be useful. The current study found no significant relationships between existential anxiety and race, drug use, sexual happiness, or any other variable. This may be due to the subject pool utilized in the current study. Most subjects in the present study were same-age, college students from middle- or upper-middle class families. One might

not expect to find age, class, race, or other significant differences in existential anxiety, purpose in life, depression, or the seeking of noetic goals, especially from a subject pool of college students.

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